

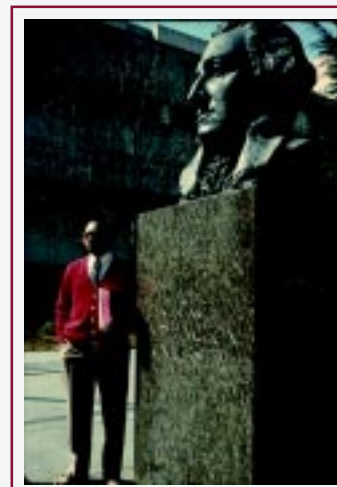
## ***Strategic Goal Two***

*Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life.*

***Objective 2.1 -- Ease the reentry of new veterans into civilian life by increasing awareness of, access to, and use of VA health care, benefits, and services.***



***Objective 2.2 -- Provide timely and accurate decisions on education claims and continue payments at appropriate levels to enhance veterans' and servicemembers' ability to achieve educational and career goals.***



***Objective 2.3 -- Improve the ability of veterans to purchase and retain a home by meeting or exceeding lending industry standards for quality, timeliness, and foreclosure avoidance.***

*Veterans will be fully reintegrated into their communities with minimum disruption to their lives through health care, readjustment counseling, employment services, vocational rehabilitation, education assistance, and home loan guarantees.*

## ***Strategic Goal Two***

*Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life.*

### ***Objective 2.1***

*Ease the reentry of new veterans into civilian life by increasing awareness of, access to, and use of VA health care, benefits, and services.*

#### **Purpose and Outcomes:**

The purpose of this objective is to ensure that active duty and recently separated servicemembers are aware of and are able or inclined to access the benefits to which they are entitled as they transition to veteran status. Awareness of eligibility for VA benefits has a direct and lasting impact upon demand for VA services, and the degree to which VA can meet the needs of our Nation's veterans. Through readjustment counseling, VA will help veterans become fully reintegrated into their communities with minimal disruption to their lives. In partnership with DoD, VA conducts outreach activities and transition assistance to separating servicemembers. VA will make health care services available for veterans newly returned from a combat zone, even without a service-connected disability. This eligibility lasts for 2 years after a veteran leaves active duty, although anyone with medical problems related to military service can qualify for life-long VA health care.

In addition, our Nation's reserves are eligible for a wide variety of VA benefits. The ultimate outcome of this objective is a smooth transition from military service to civilian life for every individual being discharged from active military service.

#### **Strategies and Processes:**

VA regional offices and medical center personnel will continue to work with military personnel to expand our presence at major military separation points. VA is currently active at 128 military installations in 39 states. In addition, VA has established a presence overseas, including Germany and Korea. There are 38 out-based claims processing centers staffed by VA personnel to provide on-site disability determinations, vocational rehabilitation counseling, and assistance with all VA benefits within 30 days of military separation. At many of these locations, military physicians are providing medical examinations that meet military separation criteria as well as VA disability evaluation criteria.

To ease the reentry of new veterans into civilian life, VA will undertake the following overarching strategies:

- VA will modify its IT Enterprise Architecture to achieve a much higher level of veteran-centric service. All VA business lines will be transformed to achieve a secure veteran-centric delivery process that would enable veterans and their families to register and update information, submit claims or inquiries, and obtain status on pending items.
- VA will provide veterans with easy access to information and the opportunity to interact with VA for benefits and services, at a convenient time and place.

## **Objective 2.1**

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- VA will build or enhance partnerships with DoD, DOL, and other organizations to improve the transition to civilian life. VA will work with DoD to develop transition counseling programs for servicemembers, not only at the time of discharge, but also focused on the servicemember at the time of enlistment.
- VA will work with DoD to utilize the Defense Eligibility and Entitlement Records System (DEERS). DEERS is a computerized enrollment and eligibility database of military sponsors, families and others worldwide who are entitled under the law to TRICARE benefits. DEERS registration is required for TRICARE eligibility. VA and DoD submitted a joint IT business case to develop an integrated, shared registration and eligibility system. During FY 2004, VA will test an integration solution that creates a VA data repository with an electronic connection to DEERS.
- VA will inform servicemembers and veterans of the benefits and services to which they may be entitled. VA will enhance outreach to transitioning servicemembers through alliances with other Federal agencies and improve outreach for servicemembers with disabilities and other special groups of individuals transitioning to civilian life.

VA and DoD will enhance collaborative efforts to improve access to benefits: streamline application processes, eliminate duplicative requirements and correct other business practices that complicate the transition from active duty to veteran status. This will be accomplished through joint initiatives that: ensure wide dissemination of information on the array of benefits and services available to both VA and DoD beneficiaries; enhance educational programming on eligibility criteria and application requirements, increase sites providing Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD), improve the physical examination and claims

process; and develop interoperable information management systems necessary for the administration and management of beneficiary claims.

In the health care area, VA will increase provider and veterans' knowledge of the impact of military service on health. Collaboration between VA and DoD during the military discharge process will be increased to invigorate and update the Transitional Assistance Program (TAP). VA will also collaborate with DoD to develop a complete lifelong health record for veterans. VA will intensify efforts to implement the Veterans' Health Initiative (VHI), including fully incorporating each veteran's military history and potential consequences of service into the Computerized Patient Records System (CPRS). VA will provide electronic access to health care information/medical history to recently discharged veterans.

In addition, VA will provide readjustment counseling services to eligible veterans at risk for psychological trauma from active military duty in combat theaters of operation, or from military-related sexual assault. These individuals will be provided timely access to clinically effective counseling that is culturally sensitive and results in positive customer feedback. Readjustment counseling services includes professional readjustment counseling, community education, outreach to special populations, brokering of services with community agencies, and provides a key access link between the veteran and other services in VA. Pre-discharge physicals will be offered to ensure accurate information is available at the time of discharge.

### **External Factors:**

- To ensure a smooth transition from military to civilian life requires the cooperation of external partners such as DoD and DOL.

## Performance Measures

Objective 2.1		Performance Targets	
Outcome Measures		FY 2004	FY 2008
Transition Benefits Briefing Participation	Percent of veterans separating / retiring who participate in benefits briefing prior to discharge	*	85% (2007)
	Percent of CONUS separating servicemembers who receive transitional assistance through the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program	60%	90% (2006)
Service Delivery Measures			
Health Information	Percent of VA Medical Centers that provide electronic access to health information provided by DoD on separated servicepersons	90%	100% (2007)
Vet Centers	Percent of veterans using Vet Centers who report being satisfied with services and respond that they would recommend the Vet Center to other veterans	95%	95%
* Denotes that the baseline is currently being developed, and the FY 2008 performance target may be modified based on the determination of the baseline data.			

## ***Strategic Goal Two***

*Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life.*

### ***Objective 2.2***

*Provide timely and accurate decisions on education claims and continue payments at appropriate levels to enhance veterans' and servicemembers' ability to achieve educational and career goals.*

### **Purpose and Outcomes:**

The GI Bill of 1944 is one of the most significant pieces of domestic legislation in the history of the Nation. This legislation established the precedent for providing educational assistance to veterans of military service. Overall, VA administers six education and training programs for veterans, servicemembers, and reservists, in addition to the vocational rehabilitation and employment program. The Montgomery GI Bill active duty and reserves programs account for over 89 percent of the participants. A small number of veterans participate in four programs that were established between the end of the Vietnam Era GI Bill and enactment of the Montgomery GI Bill. The purposes and outcomes of the education programs are to:

- Assist in readjustment to civilian life;
- Assist in obtaining affordable higher education;
- Provide vocational readjustment and restore lost educational opportunities;
- Assist in the recruitment and retention of active duty personnel and reserves; and
- Enhance the Nation's competitiveness through the development of a more highly educated and productive workforce.

During FY 2003 – FY 2008, VA does not anticipate a significant change in the training population.

### **Strategies and Processes:**

The following is a discussion of issues facing the education programs and VA's strategies and processes to address these issues and achieve this objective.

The primary source population for VA's education programs is recently discharged veterans or reservists. Over the next 5 years, VA projects the number of separations from active military service to remain fairly constant at approximately 183,000 per year, but declining to about 181,000 by 2008. Nearly all eligible servicemembers participate in the Montgomery GI Bill program. Through FY 2001, nearly 58 percent have used at least a portion of their entitlement. Today's veteran is different from veteran populations under previous GI Bills. More are women and minorities. They are older at the time of separation from active duty and more are likely to be married and have dependents. This suggests that today's education and training needs are different from previous programs.

A program evaluation of VA education programs, completed in 2000, found that the current program has continued the success established by the GI Bill of Rights and, in general, meets the intent of the legislation. Compared to those who had not taken advantage of VA education programs, those who participated have lower unemployment rates, higher attainment of career and education goals, and higher earnings. However, the study also showed that the monthly benefits have not kept pace with education costs. While monthly GI Bill benefit payments to veterans and other eligible



beneficiaries were increased by 21 percent in FY 2000 and another 20 percent in FY 2002, they do not necessarily cover all of the cost of tuition, fees, subsistence, and other expenses at educational institutions. Therefore, benefits must be leveraged with other Federal, state, local, and private financial assistance. For instance, DoD supplements these benefits with additional benefits (or “kickers”) for recruits who enter certain hard-to-fill military occupations. About 16 percent of current MGIB beneficiaries receive a “kicker” in addition to the basic monthly benefit. Legislation enacted in FY 2000 permits an active duty servicemember to contribute an additional amount, up to \$600, to receive a higher basic monthly benefit. For example, an individual who contributes the maximum amount of \$600 will receive a full time rate of \$1135 monthly (effective October 1, 2003) or \$150 per month more than the basic benefit. Finally, many states offer assistance to active members of the National Guard. The challenge for VA is to identify and seek those other sources of financial aid and convey the information to our customer trainees.

Since the program evaluation was published, Congress has enacted legislation restoring some of the purchasing power eroded by education costs that have historically exceeded the annual increases in the Consumer Price Index. Public Law 107-103 mandates increases to the full-time rate under the Montgomery GI Bill, as follows:

- \$800 monthly effective January 1, 2002;
- \$900 monthly effective October 1, 2002; and
- \$985 monthly effective October 1, 2003.

In addition to the rate increases, Public Law 107-103 provided a number of benefit enhancements for VA beneficiaries. Among these enhancements are:



- Accelerated payments for high cost programs leading to employment in high-tech industries. This provision became effective for enrollments in courses or programs of education on or after October 1, 2002.
- Expansion of work-study opportunities providing additional locations and activities where a student can work and receive VA work-study benefits.
- Revised definition of educational institution allowing more entities to offer VA approved training. This provision particularly affected businesses and organizations offering courses required for licensing and certification in high-tech occupations.

The 106th Congress improved the VA education benefit program by enacting a provision allowing servicemembers to receive Montgomery GI Bill benefits for any tuition or school expenses not paid by the military service through their tuition assistance program. This same Congress passed legislation to:

- Pay benefits for some licensing and certification tests;
- Allow servicemembers to add to their Montgomery GI Bill eligibility accounts for an additional benefit when going to school; and
- Eliminate the requirement that Montgomery GI Bill eligibility be based on the initial period of active duty. This provision allows more veterans to become eligible for benefits.

The education program is focused on providing education beneficiaries with meaningful educational or training opportunities, adequate financial assistance, access to benefit information and specialists, and convenient self-service opportunities. VA will:

- Improve access and dissemination of information. While more can and will be done, veterans and reservists are currently able to access some benefit information and verify school enrollment through the Internet. Veterans, reservists, and other interested parties can also use the Internet to ask questions regarding the use of education benefits. VA has already provided students with toll-free telephone access to the Regional Processing Offices (RPO).
- Simplify the administrative rules and regulations governing the application and eligibility determination process.
- Assess the work processes, organizational structure, performance measures, and related workforce factors to improve operational effectiveness and efficiency. VA will use innovative information management and technologies, as well as partnerships with training institutions, to improve service to veterans. We are currently modifying work processes through the development of “expert”

systems referred to as TEES. The organizational structure was modified by consolidation to four RPOs.

- Build or enhance partnerships with the DoD, educational institutions, and other organizations to improve delivery of education benefits. In the near future, VA will deploy eCert, a web-based solution that provides school officials access to important benefit information about their students.
- Provide information about the Montgomery GI Bill at entry on active duty. At various periods during military service, servicemembers are provided additional information related to educational benefits.

Since on-the-job-training (OJT) and apprenticeship programs appeared to be underused, Congress, in Public Law 107-104, mandated that State approving agencies actively promote the development of programs of training on the job. The current Congress is considering legislation that addresses OJT and apprenticeship issues. They are considering an increase in benefits for individuals pursuing apprenticeship or OJT as well as incentives for early program completion and modification of benefit entitlement charges. They are also considering a provision to address the need for coordination of data among the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor with respect to on the job training.

#### **External Factors:**

- Education Costs – Cost of education may continue to increase at current or higher rates.
- Statutory Changes – Benefits levels may not keep pace with education costs; thereby impacting on the program’s ability to achieve the outcome to “assist in obtaining affordable higher education.” As a result, statutory changes

may be required to encourage greater participation by eligible veterans who are currently unable to use their benefits because of personal economic reasons.

- Technology – Emerging technologies are likely to increase the demand for education and training for veterans.

- Recruitment and Retention Variables – DoD recruitment and retention variables affect, and are affected by, VA's education program.

- Demographics – Changing veterans characteristics and demographics suggest education and training needs are different for new veterans.

### Performance Measures

Objective 2.2		Performance Targets	
Outcome Measures		FY 2004	FY 2008
Education Program Usage Rate	MGIB Usage Rate	60%	70%
Enhancement of Education or Career Goals	Percent of participants who believe their educational and / or career goals have been enhanced as a result of the program	*	75%
Attainment of a degree or certificate by participant	Percent of participants that earned a diploma or certificate	*	*
Service Delivery Measures			
Speed	Number of days to process original claims	27	10
	Number of days to process supplemental claims	12	7
Accuracy	Payment accuracy rate	97%	97%
Customer Satisfaction	Percent of high ratings received from customers	87%	95%
* Denotes that the baseline is currently being developed, and the FY 2008 performance target may be modified based on the determination of the baseline data.			



## Strategic Goal Two

*Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life.*

### Objective 2.3

*Improve the ability of veterans to purchase and retain a home by meeting or exceeding lending industry standards for quality, timeliness, and foreclosure avoidance.*

#### Purpose and Outcomes:

The purpose of VA's Loan Guaranty Program is to help veterans and active duty personnel purchase and retain homes in recognition of their service to the Nation. The outcomes for the Loan Guaranty Program are to:

- Assist veterans and active duty personnel in purchasing a home;
- Assist veterans and active duty personnel who are seriously delinquent on their VA-guaranteed mortgage in retaining their homes; and
- Ensure home ownership for veterans at a rate equal to or higher than the general population.

Home loan origination volume is expected to be stable in FY 2003 and FY 2004. VA guaranteed over 317,000 loans in FY 2002, and expects to guarantee approximately 248,000 loans in FY 2008.

#### Strategies and Processes:

VA will implement the following strategies to ensure that veterans receive the assistance they deserve when purchasing a home, have the opportunity to retain their homes, and receive world-class service:

- VA will provide veterans with easy access to information and the opportunity to interact with VA for benefits and services, at a convenient time and place.
- VA will build or enhance crosscutting partnerships with the private lending institutions and other organizations to improve delivery of home loan benefits.
- VA will design and implement information systems that integrate with the systems of our lender partners and other key organizations to optimize service delivery of loan guarantee benefits.

#### External Factors:

- Economy - A significant downturn in the economy nationwide, or in specific areas of the country, would have an adverse effect on the ability of veterans to obtain or retain their homes.

#### Performance Measures

Objective 2.3		Performance Targets	
Outcome Measures		FY 2004	FY 2008
Home Purchase	Percent of active duty personnel and veterans that could not have purchased substantially the same home without VA assistance	*	80%
Foreclosure Avoidance	Foreclosure avoidance through serving (FATS) ratio	45%	47%
* Denotes that the baseline is currently being developed, and the FY 2008 performance target may be modified based on the determination of the baseline data.			